Alley Bar's Give Back Thursdays raises $8,000 for nonprofits

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ANN ARBOR — What started as a way for a local business to connect with the community has grown into a program that has donated more than $8,000 to Ann Arbor nonprofits.

Robben Schulz is a managing partner of The Alley Bar, at 112 W. Liberty, which hosts Give Back Thursdays through partnerships with local nonprofits. The Alley Bar donates 10 percent of its Thursday sales each month to one organization, which is encouraged to attend and publicize the event.

Give Back Thursdays started as a way to get involved in what is happening in the community and to give back to those who had supported the business over the years, Schulz said.

Schulz grew up in Ann Arbor and sees the Alley as a "townie bar, a bar that goes with the tide of the town."

"It really mirrors what's going on in the community so this gives us a chance to give back," Schulz said.

It started in November 2015, and the bar has partnered with more than 10 local nonprofits, including the Autism Alliance of Michigan and this month's Habitat for Humanity of Huron Valley. Give Back Thursdays has raised more than $8,000 since its inception, with an average of $600 going back to organizations on a monthly basis.

In December, the program reached its highest donation level of $971.80.

Bilal Saeed is the marketing manager for The Alley Bar and has worked with the local nonprofits since 2015, establishing a schedule for Give Back Thursdays. The program has "really evolved into something bigger," he said.

"Everyone's always willing to give back and help out each other's causes," Saeed said. "It's such a great feeling to see people support one another."

The program is a platform for nonprofits to generate not only revenue but awareness of their mission, and future volunteers and board members, he added.

"At the end of the day, we're not helping someone's annual budget be plush with cash," Saeed said. "It's a lot about that back end of generating exposure."

Give Back Thursdays almost is completely booked through 2017, but organizations still may contact Saeed to be put on the list.

"Now, the hard part is trying to help our current players grow and try and find space for everyone," Saeed said. "We wish there were more months in the year."

It may be the second year of the fundraiser, but Schulz believes there is room for it to grow.

"I don't think we've hit the top yet, but it is exciting," Schulz said. "It feels good to give and to do something for people. We knew it could be successful, and I'm really very happy with how it's turned out."

The Alley Bar is open from 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. seven days a week. For more information, contact Saeed at bilal@pakmode.com.